



To: Mayor and City Council

From: Steven L. Schainker, City Manager

Date: November 8, 2013

Subject: Request from Octagon To Place Banners On City Corner Posts

Heather Johnson, the Executive Director of the Octagon for the Arts, has requested that the City grant permission for her organization to place banners promoting the Festival of Trees on the “corner posts” at five locations.

Apparently, over the years the Main Street Cultural District has been using these posts to hold banners highlighting various upcoming events. To the best of my knowledge, no formal approval was ever granted by the City for this type of use. Therefore, when approached for formal approval to utilize the posts, Heather was surprised that permission could not be granted.

The City Council will remember that the use of public property to display signs is a complex issue that is ripe for First Amendment issues. If we are to begin offering these locations as venues for displaying messages, I believe it is imperative that the City Council first has established a defensible policy.

Unfortunately, the Festival of Trees event begins on November 15th and runs through December 1. It will not be possible to develop and obtain Council approval of a policy before the event begins in mid-November.

Since usage of the posts has been occurring for some time, I see no problem if the Council would grant approval to the Octagon for this one event on November 12th and direct staff to develop a policy for your consideration.

OCTAGON CENTER for the ARTS

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October 31, 2013

Mayor and City Council
515 Clark Ave.
Ames, IA 50010

Honorable Mayor and City Council,

The Octagon Center for the Arts will be hosting the Festival of Trees from November 15 – December 1. This is a fun and free event for families to enjoy together. Last year approximately 1750 people attended the event over 2 weeks. This event helps to bring visitors to the downtown Main Street Cultural District, who also shop at other downtown businesses. The Octagon welcomes various local businesses and organizations to decorate a tree or wreath in a theme of their choice. Approximately 70 trees and wreaths are displayed each year. Unlike similar events, the Octagon does not charge admission for viewing of the trees and wreaths. The Octagon does appreciate any goodwill donations received during the event. The Octagon also offers 3 free workshops for children to make crafts during the event.

The Octagon is requesting 5 banners (3 x 5 feet in size) to be temporarily displayed on downtown corner posts via zip ties to promote the Festival of Trees. Banners would be removed Monday, December 2. Locations would be the following: Main & Douglas corner; Main and Kellogg (2 banners in opposite corners); Main and Burnett; and Main and Clark.

For the last couple of years, the Main Street Cultural District has displayed banners on downtown corner posts for events such as Farmers Market, ArtWalk, MusicWalk, Oktoberfest and Snow Magic. Last year the Octagon started to also display same sized vinyl banners for the Octagon Art Festival and Festival of Trees. Recently, the Octagon submitted a banner application available on the city of Ames website along with design of the banner. The Octagon was trying to follow the banner procedure by submitting a request to the city to display temporary banners at the corner locations. We received notice from the city of concern that other groups may want to also advertise by placing the banners on the corner posts. If there's a concern of receiving various requests to advertise, the corner banners could be reserved only to promote free events open to the community that take place in the Main Street Cultural District. My question is, if there was a concern, why has the Main Street Cultural District still been able to display banners for numerous events over the last 2 years without having to submit a banner application?

A uniform banner policy for downtown corner posts should be in place for design review and application process, similar to banners requests for over Main Street and on lamp posts. The Octagon is a non-profit organization that has a very limited marketing budget that relies on grass root promotions, such as display of banners which are more economical than other marketing tools. The Festival of Trees banners are already printed and ready to be installed. I support a policy review to be taken into consideration for the new calendar year.

Based on a recommendation from city staff, the Octagon respectfully requests that the city council members hold a special meeting next week to discuss the display of the banners for the Festival of Trees, a free community event that takes place in the Main Street Cultural District, which starts November 15.

On behalf of the Octagon Center for the Arts, we appreciate the City of Ames supporting artistic and cultural experiences such as the Festival of Trees. We invite the mayor and city council members to stop by the Festival of Trees to enjoy the numerous trees and wreath artistically decorated for the season.

Much gratitude for your consideration,

Heather Johnson
Executive Director

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